Paine Albert Bigelow

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Содержание

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Chapter One

> Come, shape your plans where the fire is bright,
> And the shimmering glasses are —
> When the woods are white in the winter's night,
> Under the northern star.

It was during the holiday week that Eddie proposed the matter. That is Eddie's way. No date, for him, is too far ahead to begin to plan anything that has vari-colored flies in it, and tents, and the prospect of the campfire smell. The very mention of these things will make his hair bristle up (rather straight, still hair it is and silvered over with premature wisdom) and put a new glare into his spectacles (rather wide, round spectacles they are) until he looks even more like an anarchist than usual – more indeed than in the old Heidelberg days, when, as a matter of truth, he is a gentle soul; sometimes, when he has transgressed, or thinks he has, almost humble.

As I was saying, it was during the holidays – about the end of the week, as I remember it – and I was writing some letters

at the club in the little raised corner that looks out on the park, when I happened to glance down toward the fireplace, and saw Eddie sitting as nearly on his coat collar as possible, in one of the wide chairs, and as nearly in the open hickory fire as he could get, pawing over a book of Silver Doctors, Brown Hackles and the like, and dreaming a long, long dream.

Now, I confess there is something about a book of trout flies, even at the year's end, when all the brooks are flint and gorged with white, when all the north country hides under seamless raiment that stretches even to the Pole itself – even at such a time, I say, there is something about those bits of gimp, and gut, and feathers, and steel, that prick up the red blood of any man – or of any woman, for that matter – who has ever flung one of those gaudy things into a swirl of dark water, and felt the swift, savage tug on the line and heard the music of the singing reel.

I forgot that I was writing letters and went over there.

"Tell me about it, Eddie," I said. "Where are you going, this time?"

Then he unfolded to me a marvelous plan. It was a place in Nova Scotia – he had been there once before, only, this time he was going a different route, farther into the wilderness, the deep unknown, somewhere even the guides had never been. Perhaps stray logmen had been there, or the Indians; sportsmen never. There had been no complete surveys, even by the government. Certain rivers were known by their outlets, certain lakes by name. It was likely that they formed the usual network

and that the circuit could be made by water, with occasional carries. Unquestionably the waters swarmed with trout. A certain imaginative Indian, supposed to have penetrated the unknown, had declared that at one place were trout the size of one's leg.

Eddie became excited as he talked and his hair bristled. He set down a list of the waters so far as known, the names of certain guides, a number of articles of provision and an array of camp paraphernalia. Finally he made maps and other drawings and began to add figures. It was dusk when we got back. The lights were winking along the park over the way, and somewhere through the night, across a waste of cold, lay the land we had visited, still waiting to be explored. We wandered out into the dining room and settled the matter across a table. When we rose from it, I was pledged – pledged for June; and this was still December, the tail of the old year.

Chapter Two

> And let us buy for the days of spring,
> While yet the north winds blow!
> For half the joy of the trip, my boy,
> Is getting your traps to go.

Immediately we, that is to say, Eddie, began to buy things. It is Eddie's way to read text-books and to consult catalogues with a view of making a variety of purchases. He has had a great deal of experience in the matter of camp life, but being a modest man he has a fund of respect for the experience of others. Any one who has had enough ability, or time, to write a book on the subject, and enough perseverance, or money, to get it published, can preach the gospel of the woods to Eddie in the matter of camp appointments; and even the manufacturers' catalogues are considered sound reading. As a result, he has accumulated an amazing collection of articles, adapted to every time and season, to every change of wind and temperature, to every spot where the tent gleams white in the campfire's blaze, from Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand. Far be it from me to deride or deprecate this tendency, even though it were a ruling passion. There are days, and nights, too, recalled now with only a heart full of gratitude because of Eddie's almost

inexhaustible storehouse of comforts for soul and flesh – the direct result of those text-books and those catalogues, and of the wild, sweet joy he always found in making lists and laying in supplies. Not having a turn that way, myself, he had but small respect for my ideas of woodcraft and laid down the law of the forest to me with a firm hand. When I hinted that I should need a new lancewood rod, he promptly annulled the thought. When I suggested that I might aspire as far as a rather good split bamboo, of a light but serviceable kind, he dispelled the ambition forthwith.

"You want a noibwood," he said. "I have just ordered one, and I will take you to the same place to get it."

I had never heard of this particular variety of timber, and it seemed that Eddie had never heard of it, either, except in a catalogue and from the lips of a dealer who had imported a considerable amount of the material. Yet I went along, meekly enough, and ordered under his direction. I also selected an assortment of flies – the prettiest he would let me buy. A few others which I had set my heart on I had the dealer slip in when Eddie wasn't looking. I was about to buy a curious thing which a trout could not come near without fatal results, when the wide glare of his spectacles rested on me and my courage failed. Then he selected for me a long landing net, for use in the canoe, and another with an elastic loop to go about the neck, for wading; leaders and leader-boxes and the other elementary necessaries of angling in the northern woods. Of course such things were as A,

B, C to Eddie. He had them in infinite variety, but it was a field day and he bought more. We were out of the place at last, and I was heaving a sigh of relief that this part of it was over and I need give the matter no further thought, when Eddie remarked:

"Well, we've made a pretty good start. We can come down here a lot of times between now and June."

"But what for?" I asked.

"Oh, for things. You haven't a sleeping bag yet, and we'll be thinking of other stuff right along. We can stay over a day in Boston, too, and get some things there. I always do that. You want a good many things. You can't get them in the woods, you know."

Eddie was right about having plenty of time, for this was January. He was wrong, however, about being unable to get things in the woods. I did, often. I got Eddie's.

Chapter Three

Now the gorges break and the streamlets wake
And the sap begins to flow,
And each green bud that stirs my blood
Is a summons, and I must go.

Eddie could not wait until June. When the earliest April buds became tiny, pale-green beads – that green which is like the green of no other substance or season – along certain gray branches in the park across the way, when there was a hint and flavor of stirring life in the morning sun, then there came a new bristle into Eddie's hair, a new gleam into his glasses, and I felt that the wood gods were calling, and that he must obey.

"It is proper that one of us should go on ahead," he argued, "and be arranging for guides, canoes and the like at the other end."

I urged that it was too soon – that the North was still white and hard with cold – that preliminaries could be arranged by letter. I finally suggested that there were still many things he would want to buy. He wavered then, but it was no use. Eddie can put on a dinner dress with the best and he has dined with kings. But he is a cave-, a cliff- and a tree-dweller in his soul and the gods of his ancestors were not to be gainsaid. He must be on the ground,

he declared, and as for the additional articles we might need, he would send me lists. Of course, I knew he would do that, just as I knew that the one and mighty reason for his going was to be where he could smell the first breath of the budding North and catch the first flash and gleam of the waking trout in the nearby waters.

He was off, then, and the lists came as promised. I employed a sort of general purchasing agent at length to attend to them, though this I dared not confess, for to Eddie it would have been a sacrilege not easy to forgive. That I could delegate to another any of the precious pleasure of preparation, and reduce the sacred functions of securing certain brands of eating chocolate, camp candles, and boot grease (three kinds) to a commercial basis, would, I felt, be a thing almost impossible to explain. The final list, he notified me, would be mailed to a hotel in Boston, for the reason, he said, that it contained things nowhere else procurable; though I am convinced that a greater reason was a conviction on his part that no trip could be complete without buying a few articles in Boston at the last hour before sailing, and his desire for me to experience this concluding touch of the joy of preparation. Yet I was glad, on the whole, for I was able to buy secretly some things he never would have permitted – among them a phantom minnow which looked like a tin whistle, a little four-ounce bamboo rod, and a gorgeous Jock Scott fly with two hooks. The tin whistle and the Jock Scott looked deadly, and the rod seemed adapted to a certain repose of muscle after a period of

activity with the noibwood. I decided to conceal these purchases about my person and use them when Eddie wasn't looking.

But then it was sailing time, and as the short-nosed energetic steamer dropped away from the dock, a storm (there had been none for weeks before) set in, and we pitched and rolled, and through a dim disordered night I clung to my berth and groaned, and stared at my things in the corner and hated them according to my condition. Then morning brought quiet waters and the custom house at Yarmouth, where the tourist who is bringing in money, and maybe a few other things, is made duly welcome and not bothered with a lot of irrelevant questions. What Nova Scotia most needs is money, and the fisherman and the hunter, once through the custom house, become a greater source of revenue than any tax that could be laid on their modest, not to say paltry, baggage, even though the contents of one's trunk be the result of a list such as only Eddie can prepare. There is a wholesome restaurant at Yarmouth, too, just by the dock, where after a tossing night at sea one welcomes a breakfast of good salt ham, with eggs, and pie – two kinds of the latter, pumpkin and mince.

I had always wondered where the pie-belt went, after it reached Boston. Now I know that it extends across to Yarmouth and so continues up through Nova Scotia to Halifax. Certain New Englanders more than a hundred years ago, "went down to Nova Scotia," for the reason that they fostered a deeper affection for George, the King, than for George of the Cherry Tree and Hatchet. The cherry limb became too vigorous in their old homes

and the hatchet too sharp, so they crossed over and took the end of the pie-belt along. They maintained their general habits and speech, too, which in Nova Scotia to-day are almost identical with those of New England. But I digress – a grave and besetting sin.

I had hoped Eddie would welcome me at the railway station after the long forenoon's ride – rather lonely, in spite of the new land and the fact that I made the acquaintance of a fisherman who taught me how to put wrappings on a rod. Eddie did not meet me. He sent the wagon, instead, and I enjoyed a fifteen-mile ride across June hills where apple blossoms were white, with glimpses of lake and stream here and there; through woods that were a promise of the wilderness to come; by fields so thickly studded with bowlders that one to plant them must use drill and dynamite, getting my first impression of the interior of Nova Scotia alone. Then at last came a church, a scattering string of houses, a vista of lakes, a neat white hotel and the edge of the wilderness had been reached. On the hotel steps a curious, hairy, wild-looking figure was capering about doing a sort of savage dance – perhaps as a preparation for war. At first I made it out to be a counterpart of pictures I had seen of Robinson Crusoe on his desert island. Then I discovered that it wore wide spectacles and these in the fading sunlight sent forth a familiar glare. So it was Eddie, after all, and no edged tool had touched hair or beard since April. I understood, now, why he had not met me at the station.

Chapter Four

Now, the day is at hand, prepare, prepare —
Make ready the boots and creel,
And the rod so new and the fly-book, too,
The line and the singing reel.

Eddie's room and contents, with Eddie in the midst of them, was a marvel and a revelation. All the accouterments of former expeditions of whatever sort, all that he had bought for this one, all that I had shipped from week to week, were gathered there. There were wading boots and camp boots and moccasins and Dutch bed-slippers and shoepacks – the last-named a sort of Micmac Indian cross between a shoe and a moccasin, much affected by guides, who keep them saturated with oil and wear them in the water and out – there were nets of various sizes and sorts, from large minnow nets through a line of landing nets to some silk head nets, invented and made by Eddie himself, one for each of us, to pull on day or night when the insect pests were bad. There was a quantity of self-prepared ointment, too, for the same purpose, while of sovereign remedies, balms and anodynes for ills and misfortunes, Eddie's collection was as the sands of the sea. Soothing lotions there were for wounds new and old; easing draughts for pains internal and external; magic salves such

as were used by the knights of old romance, Amadis de Gaul and others, for the instant cure of ghastly lacerations made by man or beast, and a large fresh bottle of a collodion preparation with which the victim could be painted locally or in general, and stand forth at last, good as new – restored, body, bones and skin. In addition there was a certain bottle of the fluid extract of gelsemium, or something like that, which was recommended for anything that the rest of the assortment could do, combined. It was said to be good for everything from a sore throat to a snake bite – the list of its benefits being recorded in a text-book by which Eddie set great store.

"Take it, by all means, Eddie," I said, "then you won't need any of the others."

That settled it. The gelsemium was left behind.

I was interested in Eddie's rods, leaning here and there on various parcels about the room. I found that the new noibwood, such as I had ordered, was only a unit in a very respectable aggregate – rather an unimportant unit it appeared by this time, for Eddie calmly assured me that the tip had remained set after landing a rather small trout in a nearby stream and that he did not consider the wood altogether suitable for trout rods. Whereupon I was moved to confess the little bamboo stick I had bought in Boston, and produced it for inspection. I could see that Eddie bristled a bit as I uncased it and I think viewed it and wiggled it with rather small respect. Still, he did not condemn it utterly and I had an impulse to confess the other things, the impossible

little scale-wing flies, the tin whistle and the Jock Scott with two hooks. However, it did not seem just the psychological moment, and I refrained.

As for Eddie's flies, viewed together, they were a dazzling lot. There were books and books of them – American, English, Scotch and what not. There was one book of English dry-flies, procured during a recent sojourn abroad, to be tried in American waters. One does not dance and jiggle a dry-fly to give it the appearance of life – of some unusual creature with rainbow wings and the ability to wriggle upstream, even against a swift current. The dry-fly is built to resemble life itself, color, shape and all, and is cast on a slow-moving stream where a trout is seen to rise, and allowed to drift with the gently flowing current exactly over the magic spot. All this Eddie explained to me and let me hold the book a little time, though I could see he did not intend to let me use one of the precious things, and would prefer that I did not touch them.

He was packing now and I wandered idly about this uncatalogued museum of sporting goods. There was a heap of canvas and blankets in one corner – a sleeping bag, it proved, with an infinite number of compartments, or layers; there were hats of many shapes, vests of many fabrics, coats of many colors. There were things I had seen before only in sporting goods windows; there were things I had never seen before, anywhere; there were things of which I could not even guess the use. In the center of everything were bags – canvas and oil-skin receptacles,

vigorously named "tackle bag," "wardrobe," "war bag" and the like – and into these the contents of the room were gradually but firmly disappearing, taking their pre-destined place according to Eddie's method – for, after all, it was a method – and as I looked at Eddie, unshaven for weeks, grizzled and glaring, yet glowing with deep kindliness and the joy of anticipation, I could think of nothing but Santa Claus, packing for his annual journey that magic bag which holds more and ever more, and is so deep and so wide in its beneficence that after all the comforts and the sweets of life are crowded within, there still is room for more a-top. Remembering my own one small bag which I had planned to take, with side pockets for tackle, and a place between for certain changes of raiment, I felt my unimportance more and more, and the great need of having an outfit like Eddie's – of having it in the party, I mean, handy like, where it would be easy to get hold of in time of need. I foresaw that clothes would want mending; also, perhaps, rods; and it was pleasant to note that my tent-mate would have boxes of tools for all such repairs.

I foresaw, too, that I should burn, and bruise, and cut myself and that Eddie's liniments and lotions and New Skin would come in handy. It seemed to me that in those bags would be almost everything that human heart could need or human ills require, and when we went below where Del and Charlie, our appointed guides, were crowding certain other bags full of the bulkier stores – packages, cans and bottles, and when I gazed about on still other things – tents, boots, and baskets of camp furniture – I

had a sense of being cared for, though I could not but wonder how two small canoes were going to float all that provender and plunder and four strong men.

Chapter Five

> Then away to the heart of the deep unknown,
> Where the trout and the wild moose are —
> Where the fire burns bright, and tent gleams white
> Under the northern star.

It was possible to put our canoes into one of the lakes near the hotel and enter the wilderness by water – the Liverpool chain – but it was decided to load boats and baggage into wagons and drive through the woods – a distance of some seventeen uneven miles – striking at once for the true wilderness where the larger trout were said to dwell and the "over Sunday" fisherman does not penetrate. Then for a day or two we would follow waters and portages familiar to our guides, after which we would be on the borders of the unknown, prepared to conquer the wilderness with an assortment of fishing rods, a supply of mosquito ointment and a pair of twenty-two caliber rifles, these being our only guns.

It seems hardly necessary to say that we expected to do little shooting. In the first place it was out of season for most things, though this did not matter so much, for Eddie had in some manner armed himself with a commission from the British Museum to procure specimens dead or alive, and this amounted to a permit to kill, and skin, and hence to eat, promiscuously and

at will. But I believe as a party, we were averse to promiscuous killing; besides it is well to be rather nice in the matter of special permits. Also, we had come, in the main, for trout and exploration. It was agreed between us that, even if it were possible to hit anything with our guns, we would not kill without skinning, and we wouldn't skin without eating, after which resolution the forest things probably breathed easier, for it was a fairly safe handicap.

I shall not soon forget that morning drive to Jake's Landing, at the head of Lake Kedgeemakoogee, where we put in our canoes. My trip on the train along the coast, and the drive through farming country, more or less fertile, had given me little conception of this sinister land – rock-strewn and barren, seared by a hundred forest fires. Whatever of green timber still stands is likely to be little more than brush. Above it rise the bare, gaunt skeletons of dead forests, bleached with age, yet blackened by the tongues of flame that burned out the life and wealth of a land which is now little more than waste and desolation – the haunt of the moose, the loon and the porcupine, the natural home of the wild trout.

It is true, that long ago, heavy timber was cut from these woods, but the wealth thus obtained was as nothing to that which has gone up in conflagrations, started by the careless lumbermen and prospectors and hunters of a later day. Such timber as is left barely pays for the cutting, and old sluices are blocked and old dams falling to decay. No tiller of the soil can exist in these

woods, for the ground is heaped and drifted and windrowed with slabs and bowlders, suggesting the wreck of some mighty war of the gods – some titanic missile-flinging combat, with this as the battle ground. Bleak, unsightly, unproductive, mangled and distorted out of all shape and form of loveliness, yet with a fierce, wild fascination in it that amounts almost to beauty – that is the Nova Scotia woods.

Only the water is not like that. Once on the stream or lake and all is changed. For the shores are green; the river or brook is clear and cold – and tarry black in the deep places; the water leaps and dashes in whirlpools and torrents, and the lakes are fairy lakes, full of green islands – mere ledges, many of them, with two or three curious sentinel pines – and everywhere the same clear, black water, and always the trout, the wonderful, wild, abounding Nova Scotia trout.

To Jake's Landing was a hard, jolting drive over a bad road, with only a break here and there where there is a house or two, and maybe a sawmill and a post-office, the last sentinels of civilization. It was at Maitland, the most important of these way stations, that we met Loon. Maitland is almost a village, an old settlement, in fact, with a store or two, some pretty houses and a mill. Loon is a dog of the hound variety who makes his home there, and a dear and faithful friend of Eddie's, by the latter's account. Indeed, as we drew near Maitland, after announcing that he would wish to stop at the Maitland stores to procure some new things he had thought of, Eddie became really boastful of an

earlier friendship with Loon. He had met Loon on a former visit, during his (Loon's) puppyhood days, and he had recorded the meeting in his diary, wherein Loon had been set down as "a most intelligent and affectionate young dog." He produced the diary now as evidence, and I could see that our guides were impressed by this method of systematic and absolute record which no one dare dispute. He proceeded to tell us all he knew about Loon, and how glad Loon would be to see him again, until we were all jealous that no intelligent and affectionate hound dog was waiting for us at Maitland to sound the joy of welcome and to speed us with his parting bark.

Then all at once we were at Maitland and before Loon's home, and sure enough there in the front yard, wagging both body and tail, stood Loon. It took but one glance for Eddie to recognize him. Perhaps it took no more than that for Loon to recognize Eddie. I don't know; but what he did was this: He lifted up his voice as one mourning for a lost soul and uttered such a series of wails and lamentations as only a hound dog in the deepest sorrow can make manifest.

"Wow-ow-oo-ow-wow-oo-oo-o."

The loon bird sends a fairly unhappy note floating down the wet, chill loneliness of a far, rainy lake, but never can the most forlorn of loons hope to approach his canine namesake of Maitland. Once more he broke out into a burst of long-drawn misery, then suddenly took off under the house as if he had that moment remembered an appointment there, and feared he would

be late. But presently he looked out, fearfully enough, and with his eyes fixed straight on Eddie, set up still another of those heart-breaking protests.

As for Eddie, I could see that he was hurt. He climbed miserably down from the wagon and crept gently toward the sorrowing hound.

"Nice Loon – nice, good Loon. Don't you remember me?"

"Wow-ow-oo-ow-wow-oo-oo-o," followed by another disappearance under the house.

"Come, Loon, come out and see your old friend – that's a good dog!"

It was no use. Loon's sorrow would not be allayed, and far beyond Maitland we still heard him wailing it down the wind.

Of course it was but natural that we should discuss the matter with Eddie. He had assured us that dogs never forget, and we pressed him now to confess what extreme cruelty or deceit he had practiced upon Loon in his puppyhood, that the grown hound dog had remembered, and reproached him for to-day. But for the most part Eddie remained silent and seemed depressed. Neither did he again produce his diary, though we urged him to do so, in order that he might once more read to us what he had recorded of Loon. Perhaps something had been overlooked, something that would make Loon's lamentations clear. I think we were all glad when at last there came a gleam through the trees and we were at Jake's Landing, where our boats would first touch the water, where we would break our bread in the wilderness for the first

time.

It was not much of a place to camp. There was little shade, a good deal of mud, and the sun was burning hot. There was a remnant of black flies, too, and an advance guard of mosquitoes. Eddie produced his jug of fly mixture and we anointed ourselves for the first time, putting on a pungent fragrance which was to continue a part of us, body and bone, so long as the wilderness remained our shelter. It was greasy and sticky and I could not muster an instant liking for the combined fragrance of camphor, pennyroyal and tar. But Eddie assured me that I would learn to love it, and I was willing to try.

I was more interested in the loading of the canoes. Del, stout of muscle and figure – not to say fat, at least not over fat – and Charlie, light of weight and heart – sometimes known as Charles the Strong – were packing and fitting our plunder into place, condensing it into a tight and solid compass in the center of our canoes in a way that commanded my respect and even awe. I could see, however, that when our craft was loaded the water line and the gunwale were not so far apart, and I realized that one would want to sit decently still in a craft like that, especially in rough water.

Meantime, Eddie had coupled up a rod and standing on a projecting log was making a few casts. I assumed that he was merely giving us an exhibition of his skill in throwing a fly, with no expectation of really getting a rise in this open, disturbed place. It was fine, though, to see his deft handling of the rod and

I confess I watched him with something of envy. I may confess, too, that my own experience with fly casting had been confined to tumbling brooks with small pools and overhanging boughs, where to throw a fly means merely to drop it on a riffle, or at most to swing it out over a swirling current below a fall. I wondered as I watched Eddie if I ever should be able to send a fly sailing backward and then shoot it out forward a matter of twenty yards or so with that almost imperceptible effort of the wrist; and even if I did learn the movement, if I could manage to make the fly look real enough in such smooth, open water as this to fool even the blindest and silliest of trout.

But, suddenly, where Eddie's fly – it was a Silver Doctor, I think – fell lightly on the water, there was a quick swirl, a flash and then a widening circle of rings.

"You got him comin'," commented Charlie, who, it seems, had been noticing.

The fly went skimming out over the water again and softly as thistle seed settled exactly in the center of the circling rings. But before it touched, almost, there came the flash and break again, and this time there followed the quick stiffening of the rod, a sudden tightening of the line, and a sharp, keen singing of the reel.

"That's the time," commented Charlie and reached for a landing net.

To him it was as nothing – a thing to be done a hundred times a day. But to me the world heaved and reeled with excitement.

It was the first trout of the expedition, the first trout I had ever seen taken in such water, probably the largest trout I had ever seen taken in any water. In the tension of the moment I held my breath, or uttered involuntary comments.

It was beautiful to see Eddie handle that trout. The water was open and smooth and there is no gainsaying Eddie's skill. Had he been giving an exhibition performance it could not have been more perfect. There was no eagerness, no driving and dragging, no wild fear of the fish getting away. The curved rod, the taut swaying line, and the sensitive hand and wrist did the work. Now and again there was a rush, and the reel sang as it gave line, but there was never the least bit of slack in the recover. Nearer and nearer came the still unseen captive, and then presently our fisherman took the net from his guide, there was a little dipping movement in the water at his feet and the first trout of the expedition was a visible fact – his golden belly and scarlet markings the subject of admiration and comment.

It was not a very big fish by Nova Scotia standards – about three-quarters of a pound, I believe; but it was the largest trout I had ever seen alive, at that time, and I was consumed with envy. I was also rash. A little more, and I had a rod up, was out on a log engaged in a faithful effort to swing that rod exactly like Eddie's and to land the fly precisely in the same place.

But for some reason the gear wouldn't work. In front of me, the fly fell everywhere but in the desired spot, and back of me the guides dodged and got behind bushes. You see, a number

three steel hook sailing about promiscuously in the air, even when partially concealed in a fancy bunch of feathers, is a thing to be avoided. I had a clear field in no time, but perhaps Eddie had caught the only fish in the pool, for even he could get no more rises. Still I persisted and got hot and fierce, and when I looked at Eddie I hated him because he didn't cut his hair, and reflected bitterly that it was no wonder a half-savage creature like that could fish. Finally I hooked a tree top behind me and in jerking the fly loose made a misstep and went up to my waist in water. The tension broke then – I helped to break it – and the fishing trip had properly begun.

The wagons had left us now, and we were alone with our canoes and our guides. Del, the stout, who was to have my especial fortunes in hand, knelt in the stern of the larger canoe and I gingerly entered the bow. Then Eddie and his guide found their respective places in the lighter craft and we were ready to move. A moment more and we would drop down the stream to the lake, and so set out on our long journey.

I recall now that I was hot and wet and still a little cross. I had never had any especial enthusiasm about the expedition and more than once had regretted my pledge made across the table at the end of the old year. Even the bustle of preparation and the journey into a strange land had only mildly stirred me, and I felt now that for me, at least, things were likely to drag. There were many duties at home that required attention. These woods were full of mosquitoes, probably malaria. It was possible that

I should take cold, be very ill and catch no fish whatever. But then suddenly we dropped out into the lake Kedgeemakoogee, the lake of the fairies – a broad expanse of black water, dotted with green islands, and billowing white in the afternoon wind, and just as we rounded I felt a sudden tug at the end of my line which was trailing out behind the canoe.

In an instant I was alive. Del cautioned me softly from the stern, for there is no guide who does not wish his charge to acquit himself well.

"Easy now – easy," he said. "That's a good one – don't hurry him."

But every nerve in me began to tingle – every drop of blood to move faster. I was eaten with a wild desire to drag my prize into the boat before he could escape. Then all at once it seemed to me that my line must be fast, the pull was so strong and fixed. But looking out behind, Del saw the water break just then – a sort of double flash.

"Good, you've got a pair," he said. "Careful, now, and we'll save 'em both."

To tell the truth I had no hope of saving either, and if I was careful I didn't feel so. When I let the line go out, as I was obliged to, now and then, to keep from breaking it altogether, I had a wild, hopeless feeling that I could never take it up again and that the prize was just that much farther away. Whenever there came a sudden slackening I was sickened with a fear that the fish were gone, and ground the reel handle feverishly. Fifty yards

away the other canoe, with Eddie in the bow, had struck nothing as yet, and if I could land these two I should be one ahead on the score. It seems now a puny ambition, but it was vital then. I was no longer cold, or hot, or afraid of malaria, or mosquitoes, or anything of the sort. Duties more or less important at home were forgotten. I was concerned only with those two trout that had fastened to my flies, the Silver Doctor and the Parmcheenie Belle, out there in the black, tossing water, and with the proper method of keeping my line taut, but not too taut, easy, but not too easy, with working the prize little by little within reach of the net. Eddie, suddenly seeing my employment, called across congratulations and encouragement. Then, immediately, he was busy too, with a fish of his own, and the sport, the great, splendid sport of the far north woods, had really begun.

I brought my catch near the boatside at last, but it is no trifling matter to get two trout into a net when they are strung out on a six-foot leader, with the big trout on the top fly. Reason dictates that the end trout should go in first and at least twice I had him in, when the big fellow at the top gave a kick that landed both outside. It's a mercy I did not lose both, but at last with a lucky hitch they were duly netted, in the canoe, and I was weak and hysterical, but triumphant. There was one of nearly a pound and a half, and the other a strong half-pound, not guess weight, but by Eddie's scales, which I confess I thought niggardly. Never had I taken such fish in the Adirondack or Berkshire streams I had

known, and what was more, these were two at a time![1]

Eddie had landed a fine trout also, and we drew alongside, now, for consultation. The wind had freshened, the waves were running higher, and with our heavy canoes the six-mile paddle across would be a risky undertaking. Why not pitch our first night's camp nearby, here on Jim Charles point – a beautiful spot where once long ago a half-civilized Indian had made his home? In this cove before dark we could do abundant fishing.

For me there was no other plan. I was all enthusiasm, now. There were trout here and I could catch them. That was enough. Civilization – the world, flesh and the devil – mankind and all the duties of life were as nothing. Here were the woods and the waters. There was the point for the campfire and the tents. About us were the leaping trout. The spell of the forest and the chase gripped me body and soul. Only these things were worth while. Nothing else mattered – nothing else existed.

We landed and in a little while the tents were white on the shore, Del and Charlie getting them up as if by conjury. Then once more we were out in the canoes and the curved rod and the taut line and the singing reel dominated every other force under the wide sky. It was not the truest sport, maybe, for the fish were chiefly taken with trolling flies. But to me, then, it did not matter.

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[1] The ordinary New York and New England "half pound trout" will weigh anywhere from four to six ounces. It takes a trout nearly a foot long to weigh half a pound. With each additional inch the weight increases rapidly. A trout thirteen inches in length will weigh about three quarters of a pound. A fourteen-inch trout will weigh a pound. A fifteen-inch trout, in good condition, will weigh one and a half pounds, plump.

Suffice it that they were fine and plentiful, and that I was two ahead of Eddie when at last we drew in for supper.

That was joy enough, and then such trout – for there are no trout on earth like those one catches himself – such a campfire, such a cozy tent (Eddie's it was, from one of the catalogues), with the guides' tent facing, and the fire between. For us there was no world beyond that circle of light that on one side glinted among boughs of spruce and cedar and maple and birch, and on the other, gleamed out on the black water. Lying back on our beds and smoking, and looking at the fire and the smoke curling up among the dark branches toward the stars, and remembering the afternoon's sport and all the other afternoons and mornings and nights still to come, I was moved with a deep sense of gratitude in my heart toward Eddie.

"Eddie," I murmured, "I forgive you all those lists, and everything, even your hair. I begin to understand now something of how you feel about the woods and the water, and all. Next time – "

Then (for it was the proper moment) I confessed fully – the purchasing agent, the tin whistle, even the Jock Scott with two hooks.

Chapter Six

Nearer the fire the shadows creep —
The brands burn dim and red —
While the pillow of sleep lies soft and deep
Under a weary head.

When one has been accustomed to the comforts of civilized life – the small ones, I mean, for they are the only ones that count – the beginning of a wild, free life near to nature's heart begets a series of impressions quite new, and strange – so strange. It is not that one misses a house of solid walls and roof, with stairways and steam radiators. These are the larger comforts and are more than made up for by the sheltering temple of the trees, the blazing campfire and the stairway leading to the stars. But there are things that one does miss – a little – just at first. When we had finished our first evening's smoke and the campfire was burning low – when there was nothing further to do but go to bed, I suddenly realized that the man who said he would be willing to do without all the rest of a house if he could keep the bathroom, spoke as one with an inspired knowledge of human needs.

I would not suggest that I am a person given to luxurious habits and vain details in the matter of evening toilet. But there are so many things one is in the habit of doing just about bedtime,

which in a bathroom, with its varied small conveniences, seem nothing at all, yet which assume undue proportions in the deep, dim heart of nature where only the large primitive comforts have been provided. I had never been in the habit, for instance, of stumbling through several rods of bushes and tangled vines to get to a wash-bowl that was four miles wide and six miles long and full of islands and trout, and maybe snapping turtles (I know there were snapping turtles, for Charlie had been afraid to leave his shoepacks on the beach for fear the turtles would carry them off), and I had not for many years known what it was to bathe my face on a ground level or to brush my teeth in the attitude of prayer. It was all new and strange, as I have said, and there was no hot water – not even a faucet – that didn't run, maybe, because the man upstairs was using it. There wasn't any upstairs except the treetops and the sky, though, after all, these made up for a good deal, for the treetops feathered up and faded into the dusky blue, and the blue was sown with stars that were caught up and multiplied by every tiny wrinkle on the surface of the great black bowl and sent in myriad twinklings to our feet.

Still, I would have exchanged the stars for a few minutes, for a one-candle power electric light, or even for a single gas jet with such gas as one gets when the companies combine and establish a uniform rate. I had mislaid my tube of dentifrice and in the dim, pale starlight I pawed around and murmured to myself a good while before I finally called Eddie to help me.

"Oh, let it go," he said. "It'll be there for you in the morning.

I always leave mine, and my soap and towel, too."

He threw his towel over a limb, laid his soap on a log and faced toward the camp. I hesitated. I was unused to leaving my things out overnight. My custom was to hang my towel neatly over a rack, to stand my toothbrush upright in a glass on a little shelf with the dentifrice beside it. Habit is strong. I did not immediately consent to this wide and gaudy freedom of the woods.

"Suppose it rains," I said.

"All the better – it will wash the towels."

"But they will be wet in the morning."

"Um – yes – in the woods things generally are wet in the morning. You'll get used to that."

It is likewise my habit to comb my hair before retiring, and to look at myself in the glass, meantime. This may be due to vanity. It may be a sort of general inspection to see if I have added any new features, or lost any of those plucked from the family tree. Perhaps it is only to observe what the day's burdens have done for me in the way of wrinkles and gray hairs. Never mind the reason, it is a habit; but I didn't realize how precious it was to me until I got back to the tent and found that our only mirror was in Eddie's collection, set in the back of a combination comb-brush affair about the size of one's thumb.

Of course it was not at all adequate for anything like a general inspection. It would just about hold one eye, or a part of a mouth, or a section of a nose, or a piece of an ear or a little patch of

hair, and it kept you busy guessing where that patch was located. Furthermore, as the comb was a part of the combination, the little mirror was obliged to be twinkling around over one's head at the precise moment when it should have been reflecting some portion of one's features. It served no useful purpose, thus, and was not much better when I looked up another comb and tried to use it in the natural way. Held close and far off, twisted and turned, it was no better. I felt lost and disturbed, as one always does when suddenly deprived of the exercise of an old and dear habit, and I began to make mental notes of some things I should bring on the next trip.

There was still a good deal to do – still a number of small but precious conveniences to be found wanting. Eddie noticed that I was getting into action and said he would stay outside while I was stowing myself away; which was good of him, for I needed the room. When I began to take on things I found I needed his bed, too, to put them on. I suppose I had expected there would be places to hang them. I am said to be rather absent-minded, and I believe I stood for several minutes with some sort of a garment in my hand, turning thoughtfully one way and another, probably expecting a hook to come drifting somewhere within reach. Yes, hooks are one of the small priceless conveniences, and under-the-bed is another. I never suspected that the space under the bed could be a luxury until I began to look for a place to put my shoes and handbag. Our tent was just long enough for our sleeping-bags, and just about wide enough for them – one along

each side, with a narrow footway between. They were laid on canvas stretchers which had poles through wide hems down the sides – the ends of these poles (cut at each camp and selected for strength and springiness) spread apart and tacked to larger cross poles, which arrangement raised us just clear of the ground, leaving no space for anything of consequence underneath. You could hardly put a fishing rod there, or a pipe, without discomfort to the flesh and danger to the articles. Undressing and bestowing oneself in an upper berth is attended with problems, but the berth is not so narrow, and it is flat and solid, and there are hooks and little hammocks and things – valuable advantages, now fondly recalled. I finally piled everything on Eddie's bed, temporarily. I didn't know what I was going to do with it next, but anything was a boon for the moment. Just then Eddie looked in.

"That's your pillow material, you know," he said, pointing to my medley of garments. "You want a pillow, don't you?"

Sure enough, I had no pillow, and I did want one. I always want a pillow and a high one. It is another habit.

"Let me show you," he said.

So he took my shoes and placed them, one on each side of my couch, about where a pillow should be, with the soles out, making each serve as a sort of retaining wall. Then he began to double and fold and fill the hollow between, taking the bunchy, seamy things first and topping off with the softer, smoother garments in a deft, workmanlike way. I was even moved to add other things from my bag to make it higher and smoother.

"Now, put your bag on the cross-pole behind your pillow and let it lean back against the tent. It will stay there and make a sort of head to your bed, besides being handy in case you want to get at it in the night."

Why, it was as simple and easy as nothing. My admiration for Eddie grew. I said I would get into my couch at once in order that he might distribute himself likewise.

But this was not so easy. I had never got into a sleeping-bag before, and it is a thing that requires a little practice to do it with skill and grace. It has to be done section at a time, and one's night garment must be worked down co-ordinately in order that it may not become merely a stuffy life-preserver thing under one's arms. To a beginner this is slow, warm work. By the time I was properly down among the coarse, new blankets and had permeated the remotest corners of the clinging envelope, I had had a lot of hard exercise and was hot and thirsty. So Del brought me a drink of water. I wasn't used to being waited on in that way, but it was pleasant. After all there were some conveniences of camp life that were worth while. And the bed was comfortable and the pillow felt good. I lay watching Eddie shape his things about, all his bags and trappings falling naturally into the places they were to occupy through the coming weeks. The flat-topped bag with the apothecary stores and other urgency articles went at the upper end of the little footway, and made a sort of table between our beds. Another bag went behind his pillow, which he made as he had made mine, though he topped it off with a little rubber affair

which he inflated while I made another mental memorandum for next year. A third bag —

But I did not see the fate of the third bag. A haze drifted in between me and the busy little figure that was placing and pulling and folding and arranging – humming a soothing ditty meantime – and I was swept up bodily into a cloud of sleep.

Chapter Seven

Now, Dawn her gray green mantle weaves
To the lilt of a low refrain —
The drip, drip, drip of the lush green leaves
After a night of rain.

The night was fairly uneventful. Once I imagined I heard something smelling around the camp, and I remember having a sleepy curiosity as to the size and manner of the beast, and whether he meant to eat us and where he would be likely to begin. I may say, too, that I found some difficulty in turning over in my sleeping-bag, and that it did rain. I don't know what hour it was when I was awakened by the soft thudding drops just above my nose, but I remember that I was glad, for there had been fires in the woods, and the streams were said to be low. I satisfied myself that Eddie's patent, guaranteed perfectly waterproof tent was not leaking unduly, and wriggling into a new position, slept.

It was dull daylight when I awoke. Through the slit in the tent I could see the rain drizzling on the dead campfire. Eddie – long a guest of the forest lost now in the multiple folds of his sleeping-bag – had not stirred. A glimpse of the guides' tent opposite revealed that the flap was still tightly drawn. There was no voice or stir of any living creature. Only the feet of the rain

went padding among the leaves and over the tent.

Now, I am not especially given to lying in bed, and on this particular morning any such inclination was rather less manifest than usual. I wanted to spread myself out, to be able to move my arms away from my body, to whirl around and twist and revolve a bit without so much careful preparation and deliberate movement.

Yet there was very little to encourage one to get up. Our campfire – so late a glory and an inspiration – had become a remnant of black ends and soggy ash. I was not overhot as I lay, and I had a conviction that I should be less so outside the sleeping-bag, provided always that I could extricate myself from that somewhat clinging, confining envelope. Neither was there any immediate prospect of breakfast – nobody to talk to – no place to go. I had an impulse to arouse Eddie for the former purpose, but there was something about that heap of canvas and blankets across the way that looked dangerous. I had never seen him roused in his forest lair, and I suspected that he would be savage. I concluded to proceed cautiously – in some manner which might lead him to believe that the fall of a drifting leaf or the note of a bird had been his summons. I worked one arm free, and reaching out for one of my shoes – a delicate affair, with the soles filled with splices for clambering over the rocks – I tossed it as neatly as possible at the irregular bunch opposite, aiming a trifle high. It fell with a solid, sickening thud, and I shrank down into my bag, expecting an eruption. None came. Then I

was seized with the fear that I had killed or maimed Eddie. It seemed necessary to investigate.

I took better aim this time and let go with the other shoe.

"Eddie!" I yelled, "are you dead?"

There was a stir this time and a deep growl. It seemed to take the form of words, at length, and I caught, or fancied I did, the query as to what time it was; whereupon I laboriously fished up my watch and announced in clear tones that the hand was upon the stroke of six. Also that it was high time for children of the forest to bestir themselves.

At this there was another and a deeper growl, ending with a single syllable of ominous sound. I could not be sure, but heard through the folds of a sleeping-bag, the word sounded a good deal like hell and I had a dim conviction that he was sending me there, perhaps realizing that I was cold. Then he became unconscious again, and I had no more shoes.

Yet my efforts had not been without effect. There was a nondescript stir in the guides' tent, and presently the head of Charles, sometimes called the Strong, protruded a little and was withdrawn. Then that of Del, the Stout, appeared and a little later two extraordinary semi-amphibious figures issued – wordless and still rocking a little with sleep – and with that deliberate precision born of long experience went drabbling after fuel and water that the morning fire might kindle and the morning pot be made to boil.

They were clad in oilskins, and the drapery of Charles

deserves special attention. It is likely that its original color had been a flaunt of yellow, and that it had been bedizened with certain buttonholes and hems and selvages and things, such as adorn garments in a general way of whatever nature or sex. That must have been a long time ago. It is improbable that the oldest living inhabitant would be able to testify concerning these items.

Observing him thoughtfully as he bent over the wet ashes and skillfully cut and split and presently brought to flame the little heap of wood he had garnered, there grew upon me a realization of the vast service that suit of oilskins must have rendered to its owners – of the countless storms that had beaten upon it; of the untold fires that had been kindled under its protection; of the dark, wild nights when it had served in fording torrents and in clambering over slippery rocks, indeed of all the ages of wear and tear that had eaten into its seams and selvages and hues since the day when Noah first brought it out of the Ark and started it down through the several generations which had ended with our faithful Charles, the Strong.

I suppose this is just one of those profitless reflections which is likely to come along when one is still tangled up in a sleeping-bag, watching the tiny flame that grows a little brighter and bigger each moment and forces at last a glow of comfort into the tent until the day, after all, seems worth beginning, though the impulse to begin it is likely to have diminished. I have known men, awake for a long time, who have gone on to sleep during just such morning speculations, when the flames grew bright and

brighter and crackled up through the little heap of dry branches and sent that glow of luxury into the tent. I remember seeing our guide adjust a stick at an angle above the fire, whereby to suspend a kettle, and men, suddenly, of being startled from somewhere – I was at the club, I think, in the midst of a game of pool – by a wild whoop and the spectacle of Eddie, standing upright in the little runway between our beds, howling that the proper moment for bathing had arrived, and kicking up what seemed to me a great and unnecessary stir.

The idea of bathing on such a morning and in that primitive costume had not, I think, occurred to me before, but I saw presently there was nothing else for it. A little later I was following Eddie, cringing from the cold, pelting rain, limping gingerly over sharp sticks and pebbles to the water's edge. The lake was shallow near the shore which meant a fearful period of wading before taking the baptismal plunge that would restore one's general equilibrium. It required courage, too, for the water was icy – courage to wade out to the place, and once there, to make the plunge. I should never have done it if Eddie had not insisted that according to the standard text-books the day in every well-ordered camp always began with this ceremony. Not to take the morning dip, he said, was to manifest a sad lack of the true camping spirit. Thus prodded, I bade the world a hasty good-by and headed for the bottom. A moment later we were splashing and puffing like seals, shouting with the fierce, delightful torture of it – wide awake enough now, and marvelously invigorated

when all was over.

We were off after breakfast – a breakfast of trout and flapjacks – the latter with maple sirup in the little eating tent. The flapjacks were Del's manufacture, and his manner of tossing the final large one into the air and catching it in the skillet as it fell, compelled admiration.

The lake was fairly smooth and the rain no longer fell. A gray morning – the surface of the water gray – a gray mantle around the more distant of the islands, with here and there sharp rocks rising just above the depths. It was all familiar enough to the guides, but to me it was a new world. Seated in the bow I swung my paddle joyously, and even with our weighty load it seemed that we barely touched the water. One must look out for the rocks, though, for a sharp point plunged through the bottom of a canoe might mean shipwreck. A few yards away, Eddie and his guide – light-weight bodies, both of them – kept abreast, their appearance somehow suggesting two grasshoppers on a straw.

It is six miles across Kedgeemakoogee and during the passage it rained. When we were about half-way over I felt a drop or two strike me and saw the water about the canoe spring up into little soldiers. A moment later we were struck on every side and the water soldiers were dancing in a multitude. Then they mingled and rushed together. The green islands were blotted out. The gates of the sky swung wide.

Of course it was necessary to readjust matters. Del drew on his oilskins and I reached for my own. I had a short coat, a

sou'wester, and a pair of heavy brown waders, so tall that they came up under my arms when fully adjusted. There was no special difficulty in getting on the hat and coat, but to put on a pair of waders like that in the front end of a canoe in a pouring rain is no light matter. There seemed no good place to straighten my legs out in order to get a proper pull. To stand up was to court destruction, and when I made an attempt to put a leg over the side of the canoe Del admonished me fearfully that another such move would send us to the bottom forthwith. Once my thumbs pulled out of the straps and I tumbled back on the stores, the rain beating down in my face. I suppose the suddenness of the movement disturbed the balance of the boat somewhat, for Del let out a yell that awoke a far-away loon, who replied dismally. When at last I had the feet on, I could not get the tops in place, for of course there was no way to get them anywhere near where they really belonged without standing up. So I had to remain in that half-on and half-off condition, far from comfortable, but more or less immune to wet. I realized what a sight I must look, and I could hardly blame Eddie for howling in derision at me when he drew near enough to distinguish my outline through the downpour. I also realized what a poor rig I had on for swimming, in event of our really capsizing, and I sat straight and still and paddled hard for the other side.

It was not what might be termed a "prolonged and continuous downpour." The gray veil lifted from the islands. The myriad of battling soldiers diminished. Presently only a corporal's

guard was leaping and dancing about the canoe. Then these disappeared. The clouds broke away. The sun came. Ahead of us was a green shore – the other side of Kedgeemakoogee had been reached.

Chapter Eight

Where the trail leads back from the water's edge —
Tangled and overgrown —
Shoulder your load and strike the road
Into the deep unknown.

We were at the beginning of our first carry, now – a stretch of about two miles through the woods. The canoes were quickly unloaded, and as I looked more carefully at the various bags and baskets of supplies, I realized that they were constructed with a view of being connected with a man's back. I had heard and read a good deal about portages and I realized in a general way that the canoes had to be carried from one water system to another, but somehow I had never considered the baggage. Naturally I did not expect it to get over of its own accord, and when I came to consider the matter I realized that a man's back was about the only place where it could ride handily and with reasonable safety. I also realized that a guide's life is not altogether a holiday excursion.

I felt sorry for the guides. I even suggested to Eddie that he carry a good many of the things. I pointed out that most of them were really his, anyway, and that it was too bad to make our faithful retainers lug a drug store and sporting goods

establishment, besides the greater part of a provision warehouse. Eddie sympathized with the guides, too. He was really quite pathetic in his compassion for them, but he didn't carry any of the things. That is, any of those things.

It is the etiquette of portage – of Nova Scotia portage, at least – that the fisherman shall carry his own sporting paraphernalia – which is to say, his rods, his gun, if he has one, his fishing basket and his landing net. Also, perhaps, any convenient bag of tackle or apparel when not too great an inconvenience. It is the business of the guides to transport the canoes, the general outfit, and the stores. As this was to be rather a long carry, and as more than one trip would be necessary, it was proposed to make a half-way station for luncheon, at a point where a brook cut the trail.

But our procession did not move immediately. In the first place one of the canoes appeared to have sprung a leak, and after our six-mile paddle this seemed a proper opportunity to rest and repair damages. The bark craft was hauled out, a small fire scraped together and the pitch pot heated while the guides pawed and squinted about the boat's bottom to find the perforation. Meantime I tried a few casts in the lake, from a slanting rock, and finally slipped in, as was my custom. Then we found that we did not wish to wait until reaching the half-way brook before having at least a bite and sup. It was marshy and weedy where we were and no inviting place to serve food, but we were tolerably wet, and we had paddled a good way. We got out a can of corned beef and a loaf of bread, and stood around in the ooze, and

cut off chunks and chewed and gulped and worked them down into place. Then we said we were ready, and began to load up. I experimented by hanging such things as landing nets and a rod-bag on my various projections while my hands were to be occupied with my gun and a tackle-bag. The things were not especially heavy, but they were shifty. I foresaw that the rod-bag would work around under my arm and get in the way of my feet, and that the landing nets would complicate matters. I tied them all in a solid bunch at last, with the gun inside. This simplified the problem a good deal, and was an arrangement for which I had reason to be thankful.

It was interesting to see our guides load up. Charles, the Strong, had been well named. He swung a huge basket on his back, his arms through straps somewhat like those which support an evening gown, and a-top of this, other paraphernalia was piled. I have seen pack burros in Mexico that were lost sight of under their many burdens and I remembered them now, as our guides stood forth ready to move. I still felt sorry for them (the guides, of course) and suggested once more to Eddie that he should assume some of their burdens. In fact, I was almost willing to do so myself, and when at the last moment both Charlie and Del stooped and took bundles in each hand, I was really on the very point of offering to carry something, only there was nothing more to carry but the canoes, and of course they had to be left for the next trip. I was glad, though, of the generous impulse on my part. There is always comfort in such things. Eddie and I set

out ahead.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.